

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 HA-05 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
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R 230200Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9369
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY TAIPEI
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
USLO PEKING
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 695

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SPOP, SREF, LA, CH
SUBJECT: TREATMENT OF ETHNIC CHINESE IN LAOS

REF: (A) STATE 155052, (B) VIENTIANE 435

SUMMARY: WE HAVE NO INFORMATION TO INDICATE A SUDDEN EXODUS
OF ETHNIC CHINESE FROM LAOS OR OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST LOCAL
CHINESE. RATHER, WE HAVE INDICATIONS THAT THE LPDR BELIEVES
THAT THE CHINESE CONTINUE TO PERFORM A NECESSARY, IF TEMPORARY,
ECONOMIC FUNCTION. WE EXPECT A CONTINUATION OF THE PRESENT
GRADUAL DEPARTURE OF CHINESE AS THEY FIND THEY CAN NO LONGER
DO BUSINESS HERE. END SUMMARY.

1. CHINESE MERCHANTS WITH WHOM WE HAVE TALKED REPORT THAT
SO FAR THEY HAVE EXPERIENCED NO DISCRIMINATION FROM LAO
AUTHORITIES. THEY ARE, OF COURSE, OPERATING UNDER THE SAME
RESTRICTIONS AND PRESSURES AS THEIR VIETNAMESE AND LAO
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COMMERCIAL COUNTERPARTS. THESE CONSTRAINTS HAVE LED TO
THE EXODUS OF MANY ETHNIC CHINESE SINCE 1975, BUT WE
HAVE NO INDICATION THAT THE PRC-SRV DISPUTE HAS RESULTED
IN ANY INCREASE IN THE FLOW.

2. WE HAVE NO INDICATION THAT THERE ARE ANY CHINESE
REFUGEES TO THE PRC. WE HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT SOME OLDER

CHINESE VISIT THE HOMELAND FAIRLY FREQUENTLY ON PRC PASSPORTS ISSUED HERE, BUT THAT FOR THE MOST PART THEY RETURN TO LAOS.

3. AN ASIAN DIPLOMAT RECENTLY TOLD US THAT THE CHINESE COMMUNITY WAS NEVERTHELESS CONCERNED ABOUT THE PROBLEMS OF THE CHINESE IN VIETNAM AND WORRIED THAT THE LAO COULD FOLLOW THE VIETNAMESE EXAMPLE. AS A RESULT, OFFICIALS OF THE

LAO MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE HAD RECENTLY MET WITH LEADERS OF THE CHINESE COMMUNITY TO ALLAY THEIR FEARS. THE LAO REPORTEDLY INDICATED TO THE CHINESE THAT, BECAUSE OF THEIR RELATIVELY SMALL NUMBERS AND LIMITED ECONOMIC POWER, THEY DID NOT REPRESENT A THREAT TO THE LAO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS AS DID THEIR COUNTERPARTS IN SOUTHERN VIETNAM. IN FACT, AT LEAST FOR THE MOMENT, THEIR PRESENCE WAS NECESSARY TO SUPPLY GOODS AND SERVICES WHICH THE EMBRYONIC LAO SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT-OWNED OR RUN ENTERPRISES COULD NOT YET PROVIDE.

4. ONE CHINESE MERCHANT TOLD US, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT HIS BUSINESS WAS STILL RELATIVELY GOOD (SELLING JEWELRY AND ANTIQUES TO WEALTHY RUSSIANS) AND THAT HE PLANNED TO REMAIN HERE AS LONG AS HE COULD BEFORE JOINING RELATIVES IN FRANCE OR THE US.

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5. LAO CONTACTS REPORT THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO MENTION OF THE SRV-PRC DISPUTE IN SEMINARS AND THAT BOTH THE CHINESE AND VIETNAMESE ARE STILL DESCRIBED AS SOCIALIST BROTHERS. THE PRESS CONTINUES TO PRINT STORIES OF LOCAL CHINESE HELP ON COMMUNAL PROJECTS ALONG WITH OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS. CHINESE PRIMARY SCHOOLS REMAIN OPEN UNDER LAO REGULATION AS DESCRIBED BY REF B.

6. WE HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT MOST ETHNIC CHINESE ARE NOW CONCENTRATED IN THE LARGER TOWNS. LOCAL AND DIPLOMATIC SOURCES REPORT, HOWEVER, THIS IS NOT THE RESULT OF A LAO POLICY OF RELOCATION. RATHER, AS COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES GRADUALLY FADE IN THE SMALLER TOWNS, CHINESE ARE GRAVITATING ON THEIR OWN TO THE LARGER COMMERCIAL CENTERS SUCH AS VIENTIANE AND SAVANNAKHET. ONE CHINESE TOLD US THAT IT IS ALSO EASIER TO ARRANGE TO LEAVE LAOS FROM THE BIG CITIES, EITHER LEGALLY OR AS REFUGEES.

7. OUR LAST CONVERSATION WITH A CHINESE DIPLOMAT WAS SEVERAL WEEKS AGO; AT THAT TIME HE DID NOT MENTION ANY PARTICULAR DIFFICULTY EXPERIENCED BY CHINESE HERE. HE WAS CRITICAL, HOWEVER, OF THE VIETNAMESE FOR WHAT HE

TERMED RUSSIAN INSPIRED ACTIONS AGAINST THE CHINESE IN
VIETNAM.

8. COMMENT: FROM AVAILABLE EVIDENCE IT DOES NOT SEEM
LIKELY THAT THE CHINESE IN LAOS WILL BE PUSHED INTO A
SUDDEN LARGE SCALE DEPARTURE AS WERE THOSE IN VIETNAM.
A MORE LIKELY COURSE IS THAT THEY WILL CONTINUE TO LEAVE
LAOS AS THE GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO TAKE OVER THE
REMAINING PRIVATE ENTERPRISES. IF THIS PROCESS IS
DRAWN OUT FOR SEVERAL YEARS, THE NUMBER OF CHINESE
REMAINING AT THE END SHOULD NOT BE LARGE. IN FACT, THE
LAO MAY FIND THAT THEY HAVE A GREATER PROBLEM WITH
VIETNAMESE MERCHANTS WHO DOMINATE MID AND LOW LEVEL
TRADE IN VIENTIANE THEN THEY HAVE WITH THE CHINESE.
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